living grace

LIVING GRACE

Living Grace is a resource designed to provide healthy solutions for your heart and mind. In each chapter, you will find opportunities to transform your daily life. Both Scripture and science will give you a new perspective and practical tools. These will help you address the challenges that come with living with any mental health difficulty or disorder.

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Mental Health Grace Alliance is a non-profit organization that cultivates healthy solutions for hearts and minds through simple, innovative biblical truths, scientific research and practical tools.

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GRACE ALLIANCE
HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND

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INTRODUCTION

HOW IT FLOWS

FAITH

Investigate the lives of men and women from the Bible to discover how faith, personal challenges, anxiety, depression, and other mental health difficulties and disorders collide. Then, read the Scripture and summary paragraph. Finally, answer the opening question on your own or with others.

FACTS & RESILIENCY EXERCISE

Learn more about yourself and your experience as you explore compelling insights regarding relevant topics pertaining to your mental health. Various chapters will include a tool or exercise to help you further apply the topic to your everyday life.

FUTURE

Walk away from each chapter with practical steps for continuing to cultivate a healthy mind and heart. End your time with hope and encouragement found in a structured prayer.

HOW IT'S USED

ON YOUR OWN

Go at your own pace! Grab a journal or notebook to write out your responses, take notes, and try out the tools in the various chapters.

WITH A FRIEND OR MENTOR

Try it with someone you trust! Use the insights, questions, and tools to dialogue and grow together.

AS A GROUP

Develop a meaningful community! Meet in a small group setting weekly to go through the workbook together and discuss, discover, and encourage one another's journeys. Each chapter stands alone, allowing visitors to join at any time. Meet weekly for 16 weeks, or divide the workbook up into two 8-week sessions with a break in the middle (e.g., fall session, break for the holidays, spring session).

HOW TO CONNECT

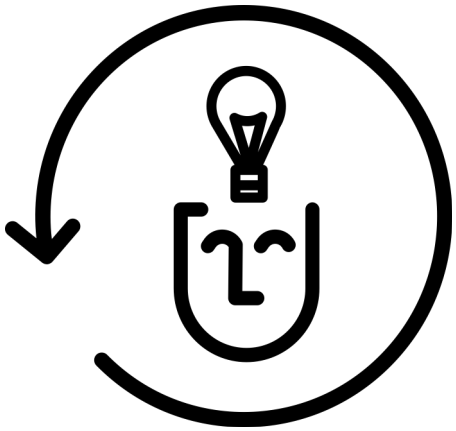
Enhance your Living Grace workbook experience by connecting and engaging with us on Facebook and Instagram. Gain further insights, tips, tools, and hopeful encouragements from our weekly posts and blogs, and share your experiences and resources with others around the world!

To find all our blogs and social media links, visit us at:

www.MentalHealthGraceAlliance.org

CHAPTER ONE

YOUR TRUE IDENTITY



KEY POINT

Circumstances and struggles do not define who we are; God does.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

***NOTE FOR FIRST MEETING:** Introduce yourself to the group! State your first name and what you hope to experience in this Grace Group.

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ LUKE 5:3-11

When Peter encountered Jesus in this story, all he could see was his own sin and brokenness. He felt unworthy of Jesus' love. He was just like you and I: far from perfect! His résumé included a lifetime of struggles, doubts, comparisons, and brash interactions. He even went as far as trying to correct Jesus (Mark 8:32-33), aggressively attacking a soldier (John 18:10), and then abandoning Jesus in His greatest time of need (Luke 22:54-62)! It makes sense why Peter later fell at Jesus' feet, ashamed of his shortcomings. However, Jesus only looked at Peter with love, seeing Peter's true identity. Despite Peter's struggles, Jesus' perfect love transformed Peter's imperfect life, by helping Peter see himself as God saw him.

Living with anxiety, depression, and other mental health difficulties and disorders can be stressful and painful. The experience may cause us to question who we are and what our worth is. Just like Jesus responded to Peter's fears by revealing Peter's true identity, Jesus extends that same grace and love to us! The key to discovering who we are starts with knowing *what God thinks about us.*

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health difficulties and disorders are physical conditions, *not our identities.* No one ever says, "I am cancer," they say, "I have cancer." No matter what mental health difficulty or disorder we may be facing, we can confidently say, "I am not ……. [depression, anxiety, bipolar, etc.]. It's only my condition, *not who I am*. I am fully and unconditionally loved by God, forever His child."

Describe why this idea can be so challenging for us to believe.

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2. Some of our symptoms may cause us to pull away from other people. However, as believers in Christ, we are not alone. We are His children and part of a greater family, which the Bible refers to as the Body of Christ. This community of faith exists both inside and outside of the Church, and even includes this Living Grace group.

Describe your experience being part of a community or a group while dealing with symptoms of your mental health difficulty. Why do you think attending a group like this is helpful?

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3. Our mental health difficulties and disorders do *not* limit our relationship with Jesus. Although feeling disconnected from God can be normal and frustrating, it is not a result of our failure or a reflection of God not being present with us. Christ is in each of us, and His presence is with us in all circumstances, both good and bad. He wants us to share our feelings, our thankfulness, and our requests. The Bible says, "He longs to be gracious to you" (Isaiah 30:18).

Without feeling the need to "do more" or work for God, describe practical ways you're able to remember that God is with you and for you.

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

OUR REDEFINED IDENTITY

The experiences that we face when living with mental health difficulties and disorders can cause us to carry negative and shaming labels with us. Knowing who we truly are *in Christ* can bring new freedom and the desire to explore the unique characteristics and talents that God has instilled in each of us.

Choose three Redefined Identity Statements (see below) that impact you the most and write them in the "I AM" spaces on the next page. Next, describe when it would be beneficial to remind yourself of these truths throughout the week (e.g., "when I am feeling lonely and isolated," "when I'm feeling overwhelmed by my symptoms").

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your responses with your group.

REDEFINED IDENTITY STATEMENTS

I am a son or daughter of a loving heavenly Father ..... Romans 8:15

I am made completely new and am not defined by my old self ..... 2 Corinthians 5:17

I am chosen and loved more than I know by God ..... Colossians 3:12

I am freed and forgiven by God's never-ending grace ..... Ephesians 1:7

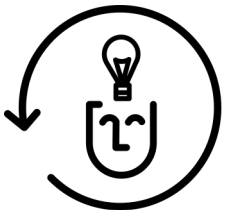
I am not alone; Christ is always present with me ..... Colossians 1:27

I am never separated from God because I have direct access to Him ..... Ephesians 2:18

I am a valued member of God's community ..... 1 Corinthians 12:27

I am called a "friend" by Jesus ..... John 15:15

I am made complete in Christ ..... Colossians 2:10



MY IDENTITY STATEMENTS

I AM

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I AM

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I AM

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When would remembering this be helpful?

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Continue to read the "Redefined Identity Statements" and Scriptures throughout the week. The more you affirm *who you are in Christ*, the more your thoughts and behaviors will reflect your true identity.

2. Throughout the week, continue reminding yourself that your circumstances and struggles do not define who you are; *God does*! He is with you. You are part of His family. His love is constant toward you.

PRAYER

"Lord, we are so thankful for the opportunity to learn more about You and who You made us to be. Thank You for loving us, even in our most challenging seasons of life, and always reminding us of who we are in all circumstances. Thank You for being with us as we grow in confidence and live out our authentic selves – who You intricately designed us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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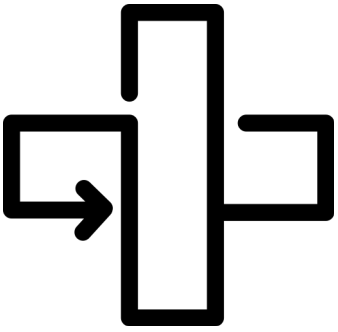
CHAPTER TWO

MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY



KEY POINT

Mental health recovery is a *process* of growth.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ EXODUS 4:10-17

When we think of a "chosen leader," an endless list of positive characteristics and talents may come to mind: excellent communication skills, confidence, a flawless record. They may even seem to have every area of their life in order. Well, that was far from the case when God chose Moses to guide the Israelites out of slavery. Moses did not have it all together and was very much a work in progress. Even when he couldn't get past his own limitations, God focused on the marvelous story that He had written for Moses. God was at work in Moses' life, and provided him with His renewing strength and encouragement through the process.

Maybe we can relate to Moses. Perhaps we also feel incapable, unworthy, and unqualified, with the fluctuating moods and symptoms that come with our mental health difficulties and disorders. We may long to have it all together or wish there was an overnight solution. Our journey through mental health recovery is not only a process, but it is God at work in us. Although this process is not easy, God is present with us as we continue to learn, adapt, and build a new sense of resiliency and renewal.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Mental health recovery is a strength-based, whole-health (holistic) process of change. It focuses on rebuilding self-worth and purpose, learning self-management tools for symptom relief, having life-giving community support, and growing in a pure and simple safety in Christ.

How does this definition of mental health recovery differ or align with how you are currently addressing your mental health difficulties or disorder?

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2. Mental health recovery is a *process* of growth that takes time. This process does not usually come in the form of an overnight breakthrough or a cure; instead, it occurs on a continuum (e.g., a progression of growth).

How have you experienced mental health recovery as a process?

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3. On this continuum, we can experience growth both personally and in our relationships with our loved ones. Instead of consistently feeling dependent on our friends, family members, or spouses, this continuum allows us to adapt our roles as we experience life renewal (e.g., sharing household responsibilities with your spouse, serving a friend in need at church).

Why do you think it is essential to grow into different roles rather than remaining dependent on those closest to us?

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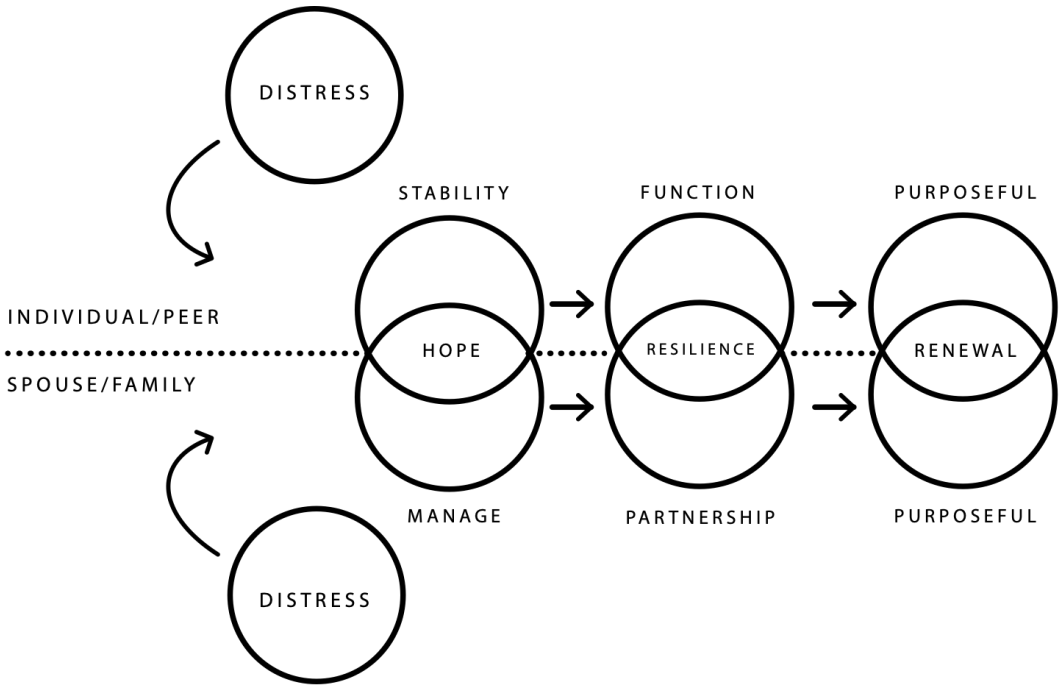
THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY CONTINUUM

Mental health recovery is a process that takes time! Below, you will see a diagram of the process of change that often occurs in our lives and in the lives of our family members and friends when we are experiencing a mental health difficulty or disorder.

After reading through the descriptions of each part of the process below, mark where you currently find yourself in this mental health recovery continuum and discuss why you feel that way/you chose it.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your response with your group.



DISTRESS
Symptoms feel out of control, and it seems like there is no way to move forward.

→

STABILITY (Hope)
Symptoms are challenging, and life is difficult, but there is renewed strength and hope.

→

FUNCTION (Resilience)
Symptoms are manageable, and you now have ongoing renewed strength and energy.

→

PURPOSEFUL LIFE (Renewal)
No longer as frequently driven by symptoms; your relationships are becoming healthier, and life has a God-given purpose.

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Continue to review where you and your spouse/family members are on the mental health recovery continuum.

2. Continue to pray and ask for wisdom as you continue to grow through the process.

3. Recognize that this is growth towards resilience and life renewal, built on hope, grace, and faith.

PRAYER

"Lord, we are so thankful for Your hope and abundant grace that is always present as we journey through the mental health recovery process. Thank You for walking alongside us, giving us strength, insights, wisdom, and even practical ideas for our unique paths. Continue to surprise us with Your goodness throughout this whole process! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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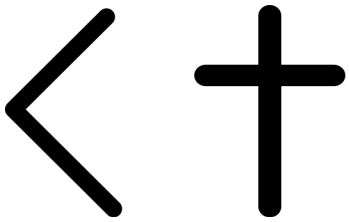
CHAPTER THREE

GOD IS BIGGER THAN OUR WEAKNESS



KEY POINT

A healthy understanding of clinical and biblical concepts (from education, training, and community support) can help overcome mental health stigma.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ JOHN 9:1-7

Jesus' life was full of encounters that challenged the disciples' faith and perspective on humanity. During this time in history, people assumed that sickness, disease, poverty, and physical disabilities were always the consequence of an individual's sin or lack of devotion. Therefore, everyone – including the disciples – concluded that this man and his parents were at fault for his physical disability. As a result, he was isolated, shunned, and considered "cursed." But Jesus challenged this assumption: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in his life."

There are times when we may feel isolated, rejected, and possibly even cursed. Maybe we've also been told that our mental health difficulties and disorders are the result of sin and/or a lack of faith (e.g., stigma). However, just as Jesus approached the man who was blind from birth with compassion and grace, He extends that same grace to us. Regardless of how others see or treat us, Jesus reminds us that our lives have value with His full love. He always sees the opportunity for the works of God to be displayed through us.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Mental health stigma occurs when others see someone's mental health condition as a personal disgrace. Those who are struggling may be perceived as different from the norm, labeled with negative stereotypes, or discriminated against with rejection. Stigma is most often born out of fear and misinformation. We can slowly begin to overcome stigma through helpful truth and education.

Describe the fears or misinformation (stigma) that you have felt or heard from others and/or the stigma that you have believed about yourself (self-stigma).

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2. Stigma not only causes inaction and a lack of compassion, but it makes people feel punished for being a minority or living with a specific condition. When Jesus responded to the blind man, He taught against this type of "stigma thinking." He wasn't looking to place blame on the individual or the family, nor did He offer any reason to reject; instead, He taught us to always see an individual's value and respond with love and grace.

Describe different ways you have seen people respond like Jesus, seeing your true value and conveying love and grace.

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3. Wrongly held views and beliefs (stigma) are hurtful, and we don't have to own them. We can unlearn the ways stigma has hindered us. *Mental health difficulties do not hold God back from working in our lives.* It's just the opposite! He desires to reveal His constant love and grace in our whole lives, through our entire journey.

Describe one small way you've seen God work in your life through your mental health difficulty.

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

STORIES OF SIGNIFICANCE

We may be surprised to hear who else has experienced struggles similar to our own. Amidst their challenges and experiences, the historical and societal figures listed below have left a mark on our lives in quite a unique way! They stand out with purpose, integrity, perseverance, humility, and courage. They also give us confidence that our stories can provide us with unique perspectives and opportunities.

FOR GROUP USE: Read the four vignettes below and discuss which story interests you the most and describe one or two reasons why it caught your attention.

CHARLES SPURGEON (1834-1892)

Spurgeon was a powerful preacher, well-known for his wit and humor during the nineteenth-century revival movement, who also lived a life saturated with physical, emotional and spiritual sufferings, including seasons of severe depression. In 1866, he told his congregation of his struggle: "I am the subject of depressions of the spirit, so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go [through]." Even in his turmoil, God empowered Spurgeon to impact the lives of countless individuals and his work continues to inspire people to this very day.

MOTHER TERESA (1910-1997)

Officially declared a saint for her work with those who were cast out, rejected, poor, sick and dying, Mother Teresa worked diligently as the founder of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India. By the time she reached the end of her life, she had founded 610 missions in 123 countries. She displayed the utmost sacrifice and selflessness. However, just before her death, she revealed that she had also struggled with significant depression throughout her life. In a letter to the Archbishop of Calcutta, Ferdinand Perier, she wrote, "There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started the work."

LECRAE (1979-PRESENT)

Famous for his achievements as a Christian hip-hop recording artist, songwriter, and producer, Lecrae has also endured a life filled with hardships and challenges. From a dysfunctional childhood with an absent father, to a gang-heavy and crime-filled adolescence, Lecrae may have seemed like a lost cause. After enduring a traumatic car accident, he turned his life to following Jesus. Lecrae has not only won many highly acclaimed awards, but he has also helped make an impact through his former non-profit, ReachLife Ministries. Yet, Lecrae's rise to fame and honorable work within the community did not leave him immune to times of depression or despair. Seeing the purpose in his hardship, Lecrae encouraged his fans by saying, "Don't be ashamed of your depression. The wounds of your depression and the scars of your depression show other wounded people that wounds can heal."[1]

SHEILA WALSH (1956-PRESENT)

An acclaimed Bible teacher, famous author and former co-host of a popular TV Show, Sheila has impacted the lives of millions of women all around the world. After years of internalized hardship and tragedy from her childhood, her outward appearance of having it all together came crashing down. Sheila checked herself into a psychiatric unit and finally came to terms with her long battle with clinical depression. This experience with depression has shaped her story and inspired her techniques of encouragement that she continues to provide women. In a presentation at Saddleback Church, Sheila stated, "I'm profoundly grateful for the gift of mental illness, because I can look in the eyes of someone struggling today and meet you there."

[1] www.iamsecond.com/seconds/lecrae/

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Recognize that others' wrongly held beliefs about mental health difficulties and disorders are not your fault. This week, talk with a supportive relative or friend and help educate those closest to you about your condition. Remember, although you may struggle with a mental health difficulty or disorder, your worth is not defined by it.

2. Take some time this week to research one of the individuals from the Stories of Significance. Be inspired how God still valued them and how His love was displayed through their lives even though they struggled with mental health difficulties and disorders.

PRAYER

"Lord, we are so thankful that You show us that our lives have meaning and value! We are grateful that, regardless of our circumstances and how others see or treat us, Your love and grace will be displayed through us. As we reflect on our journeys this week, thank You for providing us with Your strength and boldness to share our stories with those around us! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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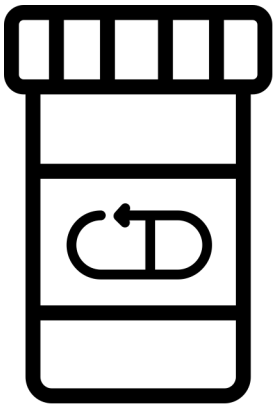
CHAPTER FOUR

MEDICATION



KEY POINT

Because mental health difficulties and disorders disrupt the general function of the brain, medication and therapy are crucial aspects – not "fix-all" solutions – of our process toward managing our mental health.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
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FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ 2 KINGS 20:1-7

Hezekiah was a great king who had a close relationship with God and was faithful in pointing his people back to their true King. Even with his good heart and honorable leadership, Hezekiah wasn't immune to hardship or physical illness. In the midst of devastation and turmoil, God not only heard Hezekiah's prayer, but graciously responded with a promise of physical healing and an additional fifteen years of life. In this instance, God used a common medical remedy of the time to display His grace to Hezekiah and bring relief for his suffering.

Just like Hezekiah, our energy, hope, and desire to push forward can feel depleted due to the stress related to our mental health difficulties and disorders. Maybe we feel like we've tried everything spiritually to bring about change and haven't yet experienced relief. Just as God turned His ear to hear Hezekiah's cries, God also hears us and can extend His healing grace through a variety of resources available to us today.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Taking medications for various mental or physical conditions is not a sign of weak faith. Instead, it is a process of trusting in God's provision to aid in our journey towards whole-health wellness. A physical remedy, such as medication, is one way God may offer relief.

Describe why it might be challenging to believe that there are professional resources, like medications, that God can use to provide us with relief.

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2. Medications used to treat the symptoms of mental health difficulties and disorders are not meant to be a cure or "fix-all." The primary purpose of these types of medications is to alter the way the nerve cells in the brain (neurons) operate. As a result, symptoms should be minimized and we are, in turn, able to thrive in our daily lives.

Describe your view of mental health medications and whether or not you've felt like these medications would completely cure or "fix" you.

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3. If we have a bad day, the first question that we usually hear from our family or friends is, "Did you take your medication?" It can be easy to depend on medication as the *only* source of stability. However, medications are only one of the many important pieces of God's faithful provision for our mental health recovery process.

What is your typical response to the often-asked question, "Did you take your medication?" Why do you think a person would be asking this question?

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4. Because we are all created uniquely, each brain and body responds to medications differently. Thus, it is entirely normal to try several different medications until we find one that works best for us.

Describe where you are in the process of searching for the right medication or medications. If you've found an effective medication, what helped you the most in the search?

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

MEDICATION AWARENESS

Finding medications that work is a process. The more we know about how each medication impacts our symptoms, the more educated we are to find one that best meets our needs. Below, you'll find a list of some of the most common mental health medications. Place an "X" over the ones you have tried and did not work and circle all of the medications you have taken or are presently taking. Write down any not listed. Discuss if there is a pattern of one class (e.g., antipsychotics, antidepressants, etc.) working, not working, or if a combination of several different categories has been helpful or not.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your response with your group.

Antipsychotics (often used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder)

Typical
Haldol, Loxitane, Mellaril, Moban, Navane, Orap, Prolixin, Stelazine, Thorazine, Trilafon

Atypical
Abilify, Clozaril, Fanapt, Geodon, Invega, Latuda, Risperdal, Seroquel, Zyprexa

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Mood Stabilizers (often used to treat bipolar disorder and other mood disorders)

Tegretol, Depakene, Depakote, Lamictal, Lithobid (Lithium), Trileptal, Topamax

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Benzodiazepines (often used to treat anxiety disorders)

Ativan, Klonopin, Librium, Valium, Xanax

Psychostimulants (often used to treat ADHD)

Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, Ritalin, Vyvanse

Antidepressants (often used to treat depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders)

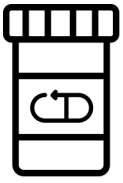
Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCA)
Adapin/Sinequan, Anafranil, Asendin, Elavil, Norpramin, Pamelor, Vivactil

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI)
Celexa, Prozac, Lexapro, Luvox, Paxil, Zoloft

Serotonin and Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRI)
Cymbalta, Effexor, Pristiq

Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOi)
Emsam, Marplan, Nardil, Parnate

Atypical Antidepressants
BuSpar, Remeron, Wellbutrin, Brintellix/Trintellix, Viibryd



****Do not make any changes to your medication(s) without consulting with your doctor. Use this tool to build self-awareness around your medication experience and share what you learn with your doctor.**

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Be encouraged that your use of professional care and taking medications are not signs of weak faith, but a courageous exercise of your faith, trusting God to provide helpful resources for your whole-health wellness.

2. This week, take time to educate yourself on how your medication(s) work(s) and the potential side effects. For information, refer to your psychiatrist, pharmacist, or the drug company website.

3. The more you understand, the more effectively you will be able to dialogue with your physician regarding the efficacy of your medication.

PRAYER

"Lord, thank You for the valuable resources you've given us to help care for each area of our lives. Lord, like You cared for Hezekiah, we thank You for the medications and other resources that have helped provide renewed strength. We trust that You will continue to grant wisdom to us and our doctors to help us find the right remedies that will make a difference in our whole-health wellness. Thank You for filling us with Your strength as we take new steps in our journeys toward health this week. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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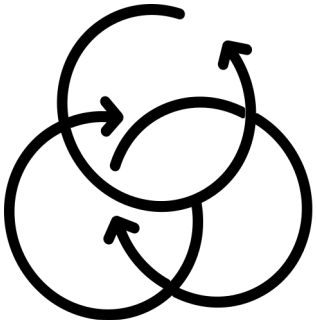
CHAPTER FIVE

WHOLE-HEALTH STRENGTH AND RENEWAL



KEY POINT

A whole-health approach to mental health recovery involves a holistic plan for every part of our lives, to work together for renewed strength and hope.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ MARK 6:30-44

Before the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus' disciples had been sent out to teach and serve. Reunited with Jesus at last, they were eager to share all that they had experienced. However, instead of slipping away for a relaxing retreat, they were met with the demands of a huge crowd. Despite the disciples' irritation, Jesus recognized and embraced the needs of His people. He cared for their minds and hearts by teaching them. He nourished the needs of their bodies by feeding them. And He recognized their relational needs by taking isolated, suffering individuals and uniting them in relationship by breaking bread. With overflowing love and mercy, Jesus showed us the importance of caring for our physical, mental, spiritual, and relational health.

When we face challenges related to our mental health difficulties and disorders, we can neglect our most basic needs. Maybe we even feel like we are one of the five thousand: wandering, lost, and confused. Thankfully, we have a loving Shepherd who knows each of His sheep by name and understands our needs even better than we do. Jesus is willing, even in our most desolate places, to invite us into rest and care for every area of our lives.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. **PHYSICAL** – Caring for the physical needs associated with our mental health difficulties and disorders includes actions such as medication management, healthy sleep routines, a balanced diet, frequent exercise, and rest.

Describe how you currently care for your physical well-being and what, if any, noticeable benefits have resulted.

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2. **MENTAL** – Mental health difficulties and disorders often involve a battle with ongoing negative thoughts and emotions that leave us feeling overwhelmed. Professional therapy, as well as everyday brain-strengthening activities (e.g., puzzles, games) are essential elements of the recovery process.

What are the specific tools that help you manage negative thoughts and/or the difficult times in your life?

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3. **SPIRITUAL** - God does not neglect us or abandon us because of our difficulties. While God dwells in glory, He also dwells with those who are lowly or crushed in spirit, "*in order to revive them"* (Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 34:17-20). The mental health difficulties and disorders that we face do not intimidate God. Even when we feel alone, He is present and cares for us during every step of the mental health recovery process.

If you are feeling alone or abandoned by God, what are different ways that you remind yourself that God is for you and with you?

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4. **RELATIONAL** - Comfort, encouragement, and support from family, friends, and the individuals in our faith communities are vitally important for our health and well-being during the mental health recovery process.

Who are the key people who make a difference in your life, and how do they best support you?

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

MY WHOLENESS JOURNEY

Using the diagram below, brainstorm ways that you can care for the **PHYSICAL, MENTAL, SPIRITUAL,** and **RELATIONAL** areas of your health throughout this week. Use the examples provided and write your ideas in each corresponding area on the next page.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your responses with your group.

SPIRITUAL

Write out identity statements (ch.1), spend time journaling, brainstorm creative ways to discover your purpose, read a devotional, attend a small group

MENTAL

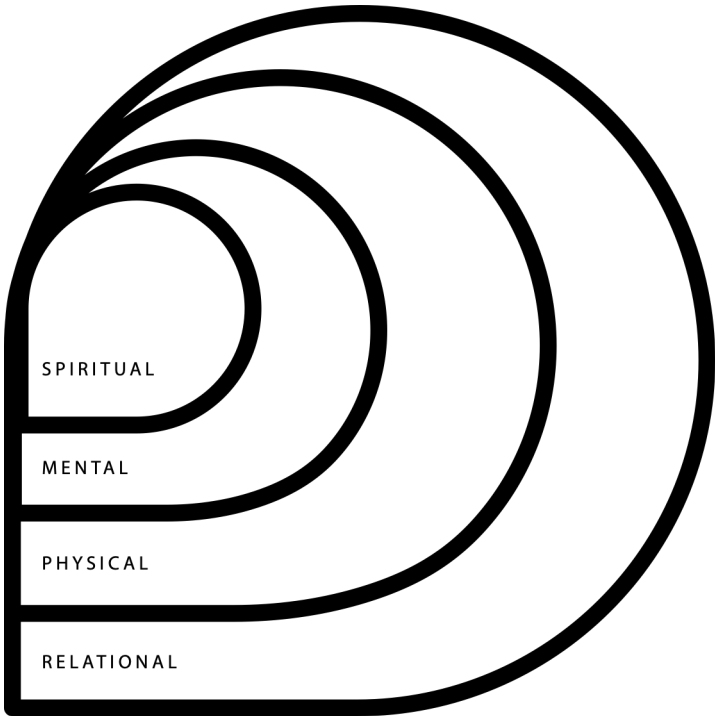
Practice word/puzzle brain exercises, learn a new stress management activity/hobby, attend therapy, create a new structure/routine

PHYSICAL

Create a healthy sleep schedule, try a new recipe, attend an exercise class, take medication & supplements, complete a relaxation exercise

RELATIONAL

Reconnect with an old friend, introduce yourself to a neighbor, invite a friend in your church to coffee, find a new way to serve



MY WHOLENESS JOURNEY PLAN

SPIRITUAL

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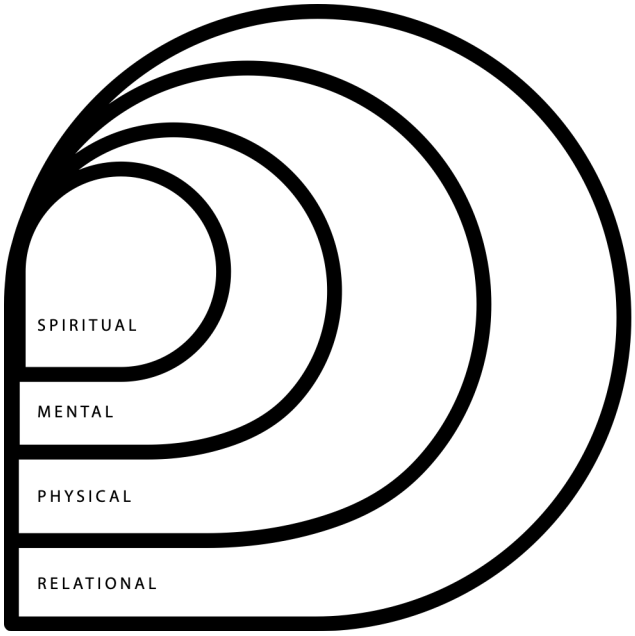

MENTAL

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PHYSICAL

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RELATIONAL

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, take time to evaluate your plan for whole-health care and renewal. Are your physical, mental, spiritual, and relational needs being met?

2. Remind yourself this week that even when you feel alone, God is present and cares for you during every step of your mental health recovery process.

3. Actively seek out a faith community that can encourage and support you!

PRAYER

"Lord, we are grateful that even in our most challenging seasons, there is hope! Thank You for loving us and providing us with creative ways to care for the physical, mental, spiritual, and relational areas of our lives. We love You, and we are thankful for Your constant presence, love, and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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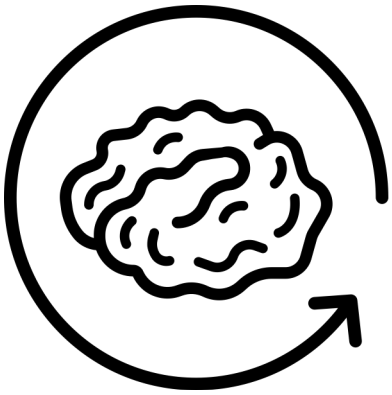
CHAPTER SIX

RENEWING YOUR MIND



KEY POINT

Our emotions are the result of what we think or believe about others and ourselves. Using a simple, healthy thinking tool can help us reframe our perspective and bring more comfort and calmness to difficult emotional situations.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ JOHN 11:1-4; 17-37

Mary and Martha's passionate personalities came to life as they cried out in despair for Jesus to save their brother, Lazarus, who had fallen ill. But Jesus' seemingly nonchalant response baffled all who were involved. Why would He delay two days rather than rush to save Lazarus, His close friend? When Jesus finally arrived to comfort Mary and Martha, He was met with loaded statements and questions: *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died"; "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"* The stress, sadness, anger, and despair became the filters through which Mary and Martha looked at this situation. Their initial thoughts directly impacted their perspective of Jesus and the situation and also caused them to miss Jesus' simple reassurance that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death.

We may also find ourselves in situations like this: questioning, doubting, and crying out in despair. Maybe we tend to see things as all-or-nothing, or maybe we filter everything through an attitude of negativity. Although it's easy for us to slip into patterns of unhealthy thinking, God does not give up on us or become frustrated with our lack of insight! The same Jesus who wept with sadness alongside Mary and Martha stands alongside us now, entering into our pain, even as He sees the ultimate victory.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Healthy thinking does NOT mean positive thinking (e.g., only seeing the world through rose-colored glasses). No one can look at things positively all the time, because sometimes, bad things happen. Thus, healthy thinking means looking at life and the world in a clear and balanced way.

Describe ways others advise us – or we advise ourselves – to "think positive" in a spiritual sense. What do you believe it means to think in a clear and balanced way?

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2. Everyone deals with negative thoughts, or "thinking traps," that can result in a less accurate view of ourselves and cause more extreme interpretations and reactions to situations. This could include thoughts like: "I always fail, so I know I won't do well on this work/school project"; "I'll never be good enough for them, so I'll just stay home"; or, "I'm not getting any better, so why even try to see another counselor?" Again, these are normal thoughts that can often feel more intensified due to our mental health difficulties and disorders.

Describe how these "thinking traps" often interfere with your day-to-day life and/or get in the way of your work, school, church events, or relationships.

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3. While unhealthy thinking patterns and "thinking traps" can make us feel stuck, they are changeable. There is hope! With simple tools, we can begin to reframe negative thought patterns to create healthy, clear, and balanced perspectives.

Describe how you have been able to change a negative thought about yourself and/or how you are discovering different ways to change negative views into clearer, balanced perspectives.

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

RENEWED THINKING

The following pages include six Unhealthy Thinking Lenses that can quickly become barriers to our overall well-being. Read through the descriptions and indicate which patterns you experience most often. Different situations throughout our lives can cause us to react with one or more of these negative thought patterns at the same time. So, don't be discouraged if you find yourself checking multiple boxes. Thankfully, we do not have to remain stuck looking through these Unhealthy Thinking Lenses!

Afterward, we will walk step-by-step through the process of redefining our unhealthy thoughts.[2]

[2] Thinking Patterns by: Burns, D. D. (1981). Feeling good: The new mood therapy. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

STEP ONE: Check the unhealthy thinking lens, or lenses, that you most commonly experience.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your response with your group.

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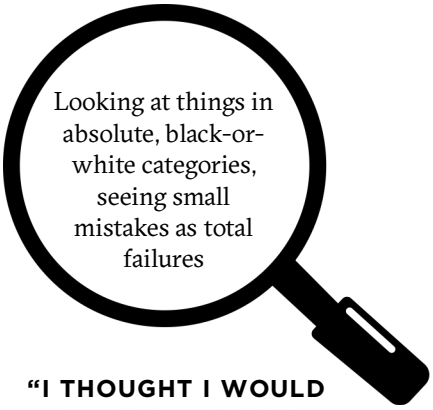
BLACK OR WHITE THINKING



"I THOUGHT I WOULD FEEL BETTER BY NOW. THIS MEDICATION ISN'T WORKING SO I MIGHT AS WELL STOP TAKING IT."

☐

PREDICTING THE FUTURE

"I'VE BEEN WORKING HARD TO PREPARE FOR THIS PRESENTATION BUT I KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE A FAILURE."

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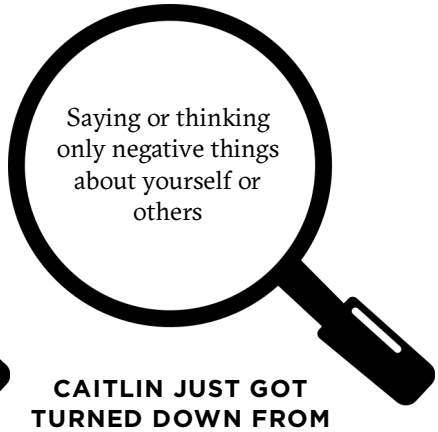
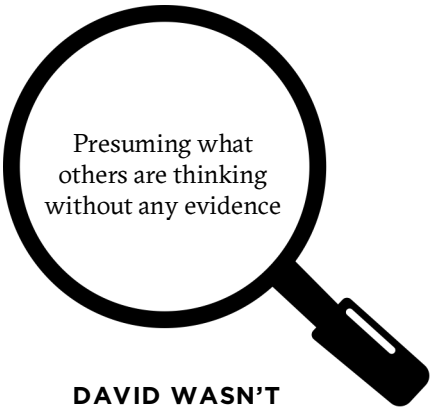
NEGATIVE LABELING



CAITLIN JUST GOT TURNED DOWN FROM A JOB. SHE THINKS, "I AM A FAILURE AND MY LIFE IS GOING NOWHERE."

☐

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS



DAVID WASN'T INVITED TO A CO-WORKER'S HOLIDAY PARTY. HE DECIDED THAT NOBODY LIKED HIM AND HE WASN'T WANTED AROUND ANYMORE.

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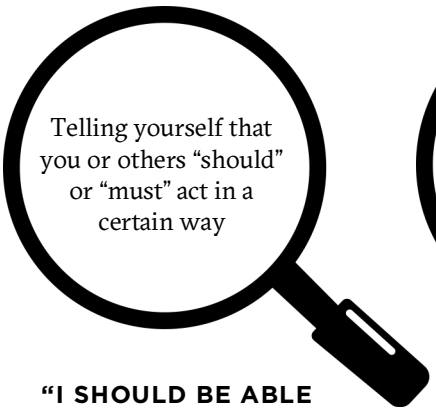
CREATING EXPECTATIONS



"I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THIS WITHOUT BEING SO FEARFUL AND AFRAID."

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THE BLAME GAME

MARIA'S SON IS HAVING A CHALLENGING TIME MAKING FRIENDS. SHE FEELS AS IF SHE IS A HORRIBLE MOTHER AND SAYS, "IT'S ALL MY FAULT THAT HE IS NOT LIKED BY OTHERS."

STEP TWO: Think of a common stressor or stressful event and use the tool below to renew your thinking lens.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your response with your group.

1. RECOGNIZE

What's the stressful event?

2. REVIEW

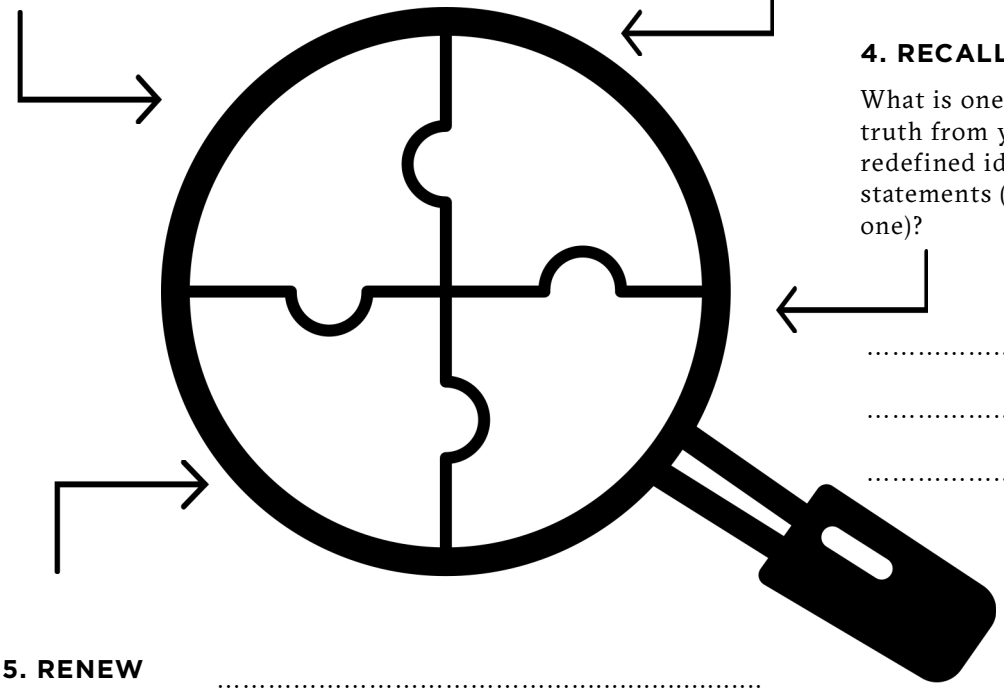
What were your thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions?

3. REALIZE

What was the thinking lens you looked through (refer to previous page)?

4. RECALL

What is one comforting truth from your redefined identity statements (see chapter one)?



5. RENEW

What is your renewed thought about this event?

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, find comfort in knowing that having negative thoughts is a normal experience. You can change them by focusing on your renewed thoughts and encouraging truths to bring you comfort each day.

2. Be aware of various unhealthy lenses, or "thinking traps," that always seem to arise in stress. Continue to use the Renewed Thinking Tool and exercise each time you start to have negative or upsetting thoughts and feelings.

PRAYER

"Lord, we thank You that we are not stuck in our thoughts and that You give us the ability to learn how to have a more balanced perspective on life. We are grateful that our perspective always starts with the victory we already have in You! As You guide us this week, empower us to grow in awareness of how our thoughts impact our day-to-day lives and how we can renew them to clear thinking. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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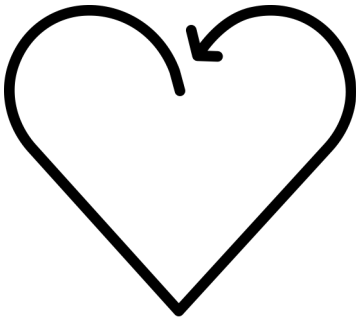
CHAPTER SEVEN

REST, RELAXATION, AND JOY



KEY POINT

Finding ways to bring rest and joy into daily life can bring refreshment and renewal through each season of life.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ MARK 4:35-41

Imagine setting out for a simple boat ride and unexpectedly coming face-to-face with violent waves that convince you that death is imminent. Water wasn't the only thing that filled this boat as sheer panic and terror flooded the hearts and minds of the disciples. But in the midst of complete chaos, Jesus slept. While the disciples feared for their lives, Jesus rested. The peace and contentment that Jesus displayed that day on the boat came from a deep-seated trust that no matter how large the waves, God was still in control.

Living with mental health difficulties and disorders, we often feel like we're caught in our own uncontrollable storm. Day in and day out, we may feel like it's impossible to find any rest, peace, or relief from our unpredictable symptoms. Jesus provides us with the hope that even in our greatest storms of life, rest and relaxation are still possible. Instead of waiting for the storms of our lives to fade away, we can creatively connect with the heart of the Father and find peace of mind, relaxation and joy today!

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. The stress and pressure from our mental health difficulties and disorders can make us feel overwhelmed and out of control. Having a good structure and routine for your day is important to feel restful. Without structure, we may find ourselves distracted and lacking purpose.

How do you find simple ways to build structure and routine into your daily life?

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2. Finding humor and joy in our day-to-day lives is one way to bring a sense of refreshment. Having a hobby, doing something fun, or watching a comedy movie are all healthy outlets.

Describe a time when you found yourself enjoying an activity or laughing at a funny person or situation. How did these moments help ease some of your symptoms?

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3. Some of the symptoms we experience can cause us to isolate and lose interest in the things that we once enjoyed. We need to be patient with ourselves as we take small steps to reintroduce former hobbies or find new enjoyable activities. Take heart during the process, as these new hobbies can not only be therapeutic, but can help build our confidence and self-worth.

What are some things (hobbies) that you enjoy doing and which of these bring you relief? Also, how can you start to build these into your schedule consistently?

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4. Many of us may feel overwhelming anxiety when we try to focus on God while reading the Bible or praying. This experience can result in feelings of guilt, and can make us feel as if we are not "good" Christians. Take time to focus on the fact that God is already satisfied with us and His love is at rest with us (see Hebrews 4:9-11). Our devotion is not to earn God's love, but to explore His love fulfilled for us and to rest in that love. From that kind of love we can do all things through Christ (see Philippians 4:13).

What are simple ways that you can find rest with God without feeling the need to do something more for Him?

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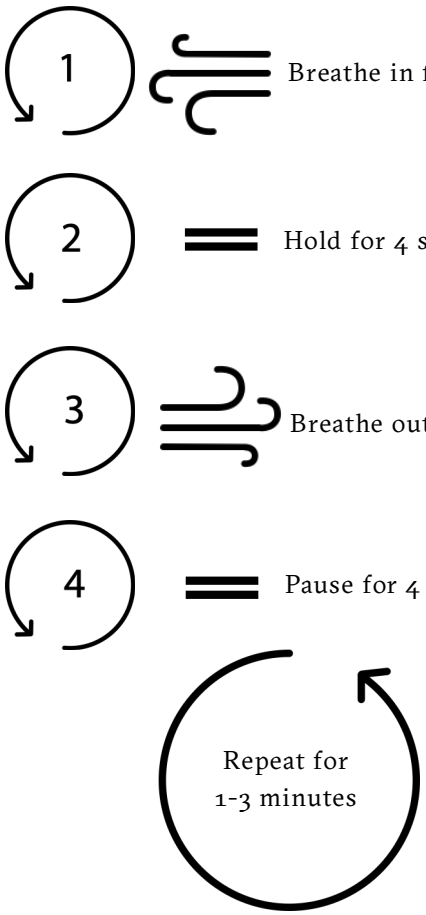
THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

BREATHING & MUSCLE RELAXATION

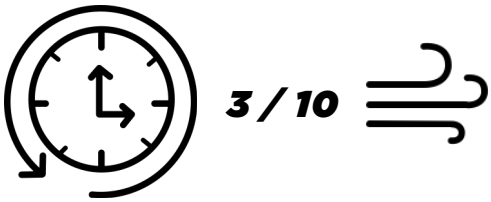
The physical symptoms of stress and anxiety (e.g., heart racing, sweating, shortness of breath, nausea) can be overwhelming. Thankfully, relaxation techniques, like progressive muscle relaxation and paced breathing, are valuable techniques to use during episodes of panic *and* in our daily lives. Take time to read through the three different relaxation techniques and choose one to use today!

FOR GROUP USE: Try the Four Square Breathing technique as well as steps 7-8 of the Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

FOUR SQUARE BREATHING



PACED BREATHING



Breathe in to the count of 3 and out to the count of 10 for 3-5 breaths, making sure that you slowly and fully exhale.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

1. **Posture:** Take a seat, get comfortable, and take a few deep breaths.

2. **Face and Forehead:** Begin by tensing the muscles in your face. Tense the muscles in your forehead and scalp by wrinkling your forehead and frowning. Now, relax, allowing your forehead be "smooth."

3. **Eyes:** Tense the muscles around your eyes by shutting your eyes tightly together. Now, relax and let your eyelids be smooth and let your eyes "float" in their sockets.

4. **Cheeks and Jaws:** Now, tense the muscles in your cheeks and jaws by gritting your teeth together firmly. Then, relax and let your lips part slightly and let your jaw "hang loose."

5. **Neck:** Moving to the muscles in your neck, tense the muscles by pressing the back of your head against the chair as if you are looking up at the ceiling. Now, relax and let your chin come down to your chest and rotate your head from side to side, before returning your head to a comfortable position.

6. **Shoulders:** Tense the muscles in your shoulders by shrugging your shoulders upwards towards your ears. Now, relax and let the weight of your arms bring your shoulders down into a slumped and relaxed position.

7. **Hands and Forearms:** Tense the muscles in your hands and forearms by clenching your hands into fists. Now, relax, unclenching your fingers and allowing them to spread out.

8. **Upper Arms:** Tense the muscles in your upper arms by bending your arms at the elbow and flexing. Now, relax.

9. **Back:** Tense the muscles in your upper, middle and lower back by arching your back away from the chair. Now, relax.

10. **Chest:** Tense the muscles in your chest by taking a deep breath and holding it for about 5 seconds. Now, slowly exhale through your mouth. Take another deep breath. Breathe out more air than you breathed in. Take another deep breath. Slowly exhale and then continue breathing normally.

11. **Abdomen:** Next, tense the muscles in your abdomen either by pulling your stomach in or pushing it out. Now, relax.

12. **Hips and Thighs:** Moving to the lower half of your body, tense the muscles in your hips and thighs by pressing the heels of your feet against the chair. Now, relax.

13. **Lower Legs:** Finally, tense the muscles in your calves, ankles, feet, and toes by pointing your toes away from your body. Then, relax.

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. **STRUCTURE & ROUTINE –** This week, set up a daily routine for exercise, meals, sleep, work, and enjoyable activities. Make sure to include ways to relax, laugh, and know God enjoys you!

2. **REST & JOY –** Find hope this week as Jesus encouraged the heavy-laden to find rest in Him (Matthew 11:28-30). Even the disciples, who experienced suffering for sharing the gospel, were refreshed with His Spirit and joy (Acts 13:52).

3. **RELAXATION –** Begin practicing one relaxation technique daily.

PRAYER

"Lord, we thank You that even when we feel weary and burdened, You encourage us to come to You; You promise to provide us with Your caring comfort and rest. Thank You that You will continue to guide us as we find new opportunities to learn and explore ways for structure, routine, rest, joy, and relaxation. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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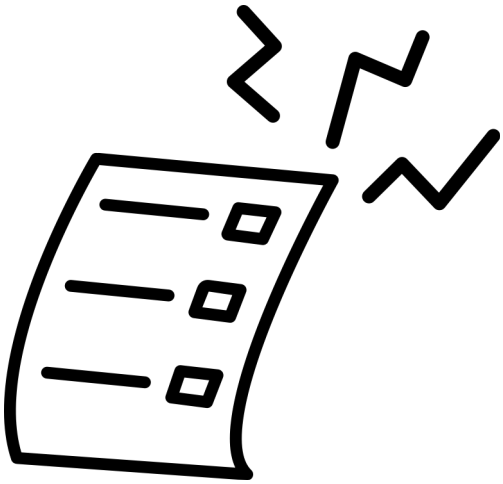
CHAPTER EIGHT

MANAGING STRESSORS



KEY POINT

Managing stressors in a healthy way involves positive coping strategies that are empowering and minimize feelings of helplessness.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ JUDGES 6:11-18; 7:1-8

Gideon, an Israelite military leader, judge, and prophet, was best known for his strength and brave spirit. However, bravery and strength weren't always Gideon's natural responses when stress entered the picture. When Gideon was called to help Israel fight against the Midianites, he was overwhelmed, extremely insecure, and probably downright terrified by the challenging circumstances. He not only doubted himself, but he doubted God. God embraced Gideon in all of his humanness, and He was extravagant in His faithfulness and love. He saw Gideon's doubts and insecurities. But that did not stop Him from clarifying and reinforcing Gideon's true identity: God's mighty warrior.

Like Gideon, our mental health difficulties and disorders can cause us to doubt God and who He made us to be. We would give anything to find an escape route to avoid our stress altogether. Even in our questions and our insecurities, God steps in to clarify who we are to Him: mighty warriors who are "more than conquerors," with an inseparable love!* Taking the first step is the hardest, but we can be comforted by the knowledge that God is present, and He provides us with an abundance of tools and resources we need in order to see our own victories!

What do you find interesting about this story?

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*See Romans 8:37: "But in all these things (trials, hardships) we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

FACTS

1. Mental health recovery is an ongoing, daily process. It involves learning healthy ways to cope and build ongoing resilience (e.g., the ability to bounce back from stressful situations).

How have you seen mental health resilience develop in your own life?

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2. Healthy and active coping means identifying the impact that mental health difficulties and disorders have on our lives, and then making changes that take direct action to improve our current situation and our future health and well-being.

How do you currently manage the stress, anxiety, and challenges related to your mental health difficulty or disorder?

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3. There are both healthy and unhealthy ways to cope with our mental health difficulties and disorders. Some unhealthy coping strategies include venting to hurt someone, anger, aggression, denial, substance abuse, isolation, and self-blame. Healthy coping strategies include planning and structure, humor, getting support from others, positive distractions, relaxation techniques, and encouraging comfort and truth from our faith.

How can you tell if a coping strategy is healthy or unhealthy? How would your life be different if you continually tried new healthy coping strategies and used the ones that work for you?

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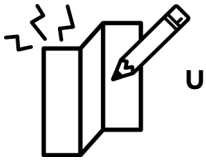
THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

STRESS BUSTERS

Living with mental health difficulties and disorders can be overwhelming and bring about various types of challenges and stressors. To create a healthy plan to manage our stress, we must first build our awareness and identify how we currently manage stress.

Review the list below and check the boxes next to the different healthy and unhealthy coping strategies that you may be currently using.

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your current strategies with your group.



UNHEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

- ☐ Finding ways to feel physical pain
- ☐ Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or taking drugs
- ☐ Avoiding family or friends; spending extended time alone
- ☐ Seeking physical/sexual relationships
- ☐ Yelling, getting into physical fights, etc.
- ☐ Multiple impulsive purchases
- ☐ Not eating enough, skipping meals, comfort eating or over-eating
- ☐ Sleeping too much or not sleeping at all
- ☐ Blaming yourself or thinking negative things about yourself
- ☐ Participating in risky or dangerous activities or behaviors
- ☐ Spending time with others who reinforce all of the above

HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

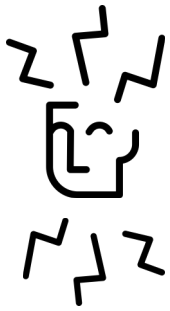
- ☐ Creating a schedule or routine
- ☐ Starting a simple project (e.g., cleaning, gardening, painting, knitting)
- ☐ Completing a relaxation exercise (e.g., deep breathing, meditation, etc.)
- ☐ Saying a simple prayer that reinforces God's presence and care
- ☐ Using healthy thinking and reaffirming identity tools
- ☐ Focusing on gratitude/thankfulness
- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Reading an uplifting devotional
- ☐ Attending an exercise class
- ☐ Going for a short walk or run
- ☐ Spending time with a close friend
- ☐ Watching a short, funny and light-hearted TV show/video
- ☐ Taking a relaxing shower or bath
- ☐ Playing a game or working on a puzzle
- ☐ Picking up an old hobby (e.g., art, photography, music, reading, writing)
- ☐ Getting a massage

STRESS BUSTERS (continued)

In the spaces below, describe a common stressful situation (**STRESSOR**) that you typically encounter throughout your week. Using the list of Healthy Coping Strategies listed on the previous page, choose one new way that you plan to manage this stressor (**COPING STRATEGY**). Finally, as you prepare to use this new coping strategy, what is the **RESULT** that you want to see? How do you hope this new strategy will impact your physical, mental, spiritual, and relational health and well-being? Use the example listed below to help you get started.

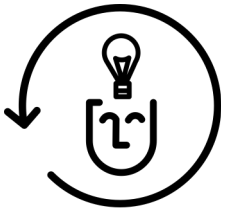
FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your results with your group.

1 STRESSOR



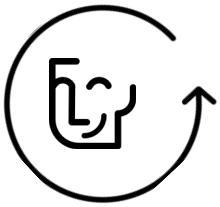
Overwhelmed by the amount of work I have to get done before a deadline, not knowing where to begin, and stressed that I won't get it done.

2 COPING STRATEGY



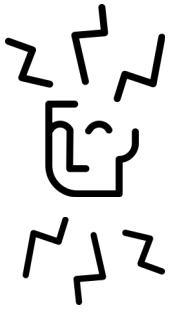
Create a detailed schedule, breaking up overall work responsibilities into small, manageable parts over a few days.

3 RESULT

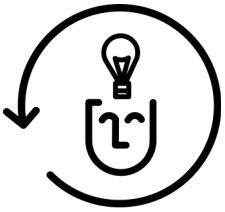


Feeling like each day, there is an opportunity for a small accomplishment, along with making actual progress on the work, rather than feeling overwhelmed and paralyzed.

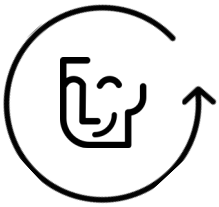
1 MY STRESSOR



2 MY COPING STRATEGY



3 MY RESULT



FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, practice using different healthy coping strategies to find which ones are most helpful for you.

2. Continue to identify and minimize the use of unhealthy coping strategies in your daily life. God's grace is with you to help you slowly transform your unhealthy patterns into healthy and hopeful solutions.

PRAYER

"Lord, thank You that You're not frustrated with us. Instead, You lovingly understand our everyday challenges and our unique journeys. Thank You for being present with us in our greatest times of need, and reminding us that we are more than conquerors with Your inseparable love! Thank You for providing us with an abundance of simple tools and resources to help us manage the stress in our lives and for empowering us this week to live courageously. We are grateful that we can rest, knowing that in You we are more than enough! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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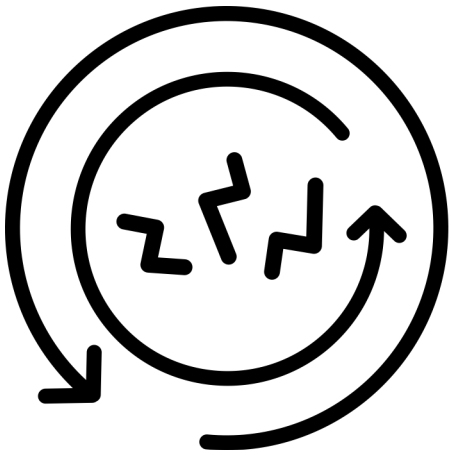
CHAPTER NINE

CYCLES AND TRIGGERS



KEY POINT

Having a bad day or a hard time doesn't mean we're failing. Times of stability and difficulty are all part of the mental health recovery process and are to be expected.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13

As the author of a majority of the New Testament books, Paul experienced great adventures and triumphs for God's Kingdom and also endured some incredible seasons of suffering. He even lived through what may have been considered a depressive episode in today's terms (2 Cor. 7:5-6). It was in the midst of these challenges that God taught Paul to have a contented heart and mind and to reframe his entire situation to start with the truth that Jesus was within his life. God didn't expect Paul to get it together and fix his life. Instead, God empowered Paul with enduring strength, caring comfort, and new insights to help him manage the inevitable ups and downs of his life.

There may be many days when we hope for a life that's free of the challenges related to our mental health difficulties and disorders. We may even question whether God sees, hears, or cares. Thankfully, Paul's endurance and ability to learn in his trials give us hope and a promise that God is with us in our greatest highs and our challenging lows. He empowers us with His strength and a greater insight to bring both contentment and the ability to thrive through every season of life!

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. **CYCLES** – During times of stability, common signs often appear that reveal a more difficult cycle (episode) is coming. Some of these signs include losing sleep or oversleeping, increased irritability, not eating or over-eating, racing thoughts or slower cognitive processing, or increased anxiety or nervousness.

Describe ways that you have experienced and seen these signs appear before a difficult episode.

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2. **TRIGGERS** – Overwhelming stress can trigger our symptoms, affecting our stability and focus. These triggering situations (e.g., relational conflict, loud noises related to a traumatic event, financial problems, physical illness) also activate our brain and nervous system into a fight-or-flight response.

What are the specific stressors or situations that seem to trigger your symptoms? Describe what happens and how you have learned to manage these triggers. Have you found joy in this self-management?

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3. **SEASONAL CHANGES** – Negative cycles can also be triggered by seasonal changes, events, or transitional times (e.g., holidays, an anniversary date related to stress or loss, end of a school semester). Thankfully, these triggers can be predicted and the effects can be minimized. Structure and routine, including both our daily activity and weekly schedules, can help us maintain resiliency when we experience cyclical patterns and unpredictable triggering situations.

How do you specifically navigate seasonal changes or transitional times that you know tend to bring about more stress and difficulty?

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4. Our cycles and triggers are related to our mental health difficulties and disorders. We are not failures in our faith or as a person because of them.

How have you found ways to remind yourself that the challenges you face because of your mental health difficulty or disorder are not the result of you failing God?

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Take note of the triggering events and particular cycles in your life and prepare a plan with your supportive community (e.g., doctor, therapist, family, close social/spiritual community) for how you might adjust to and manage the stress and symptoms better.

2. Identify and learn new therapeutic tools and outlets (e.g., relaxation techniques, healthy distractions, healthy boundaries, and exercise) so that your symptoms do not become overwhelming and distressing. For extra encouragement, refer back to the chapter on managing our stressors.

3. In times of stability, simple Bible study and encouraging interactions with a faith community can help to build your confidence. Remember, it is Christ who gives us strength and sustaining grace during both the good times and the bad.

PRAYER

"Lord, we are so grateful that You are the God who sees us, hears us, and knows our every need. We know we are not alone! Thank You for creating each of us with an ability to learn and grow through our most challenging seasons and circumstances. Thank You for giving us Your strength as we take new steps to create a healthy structure and routine in our daily lives. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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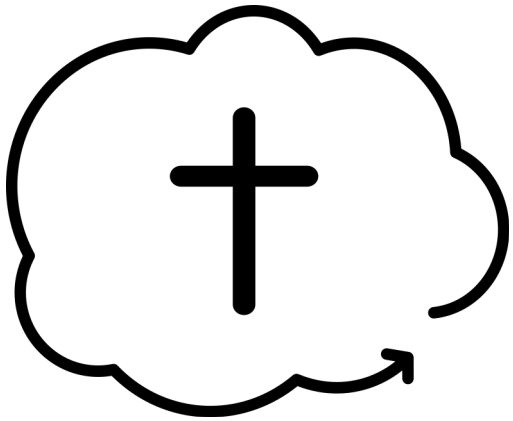
CHAPTER TEN

MINDFUL OF GRACE



KEY POINT

Biblical mindfulness and meditation help to promote relaxation, mood stability, and symptom and stress reduction, while encouraging positive self-esteem and intentionality regarding faith.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ PSALM 1:1-3 AND PSALM 119:147-148

The author of these two Psalms is David, one of the great kings of Israel. As a young shepherd boy, God chose David to be the next king. It was only shortly after this that David found himself face-to-face with a giant named Goliath. Even after a miraculous victory, David would spend many years running and hiding from a jealous king who was after his life. After David eventually became king, his struggles continued through various war campaigns, his own moral failures, and even betrayal from his own son. David was far from perfect. Still, he is remembered as "a man after God's own heart" as he fulfilled God's purposes in his generation (Acts 13:22, 36). Regardless of the circumstances, David's perseverance and strength came from the meditations of his heart and mind. He mindfully connected to God, where he was able to find a renewed strength and trust in the Lord's love and grace, to continue moving forward.

When we feel powerless and drained, it's helpful to remember that David's strength and perseverance came from his meditation on God's love and grace. David provides us with the hope that we can find true joy and contentment in the Lord in the midst of challenging seasons with our mental health difficulties or disorders. Meditating on the Lord is simply another way to become more aware of His constant hope-filled presence, and to see our hearts and minds deeply rooted within His never-ending love and grace.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Biblical mindfulness and meditation techniques are not attempting to achieve mystical states of complete "serenity." Instead, they are simple ways of learning to "be still, and know that I am God …" (Psalm 46:10). Mindfulness and meditation techniques are used to slow our hearts and minds and make us aware that Jesus' peace is available to us at that very moment (John 14:18, 27). This practice helps us learn how to bring our focus to God's positive attributes, images, and any other information and/or activities that provide greater self-care and comfort.

Describe your experience with this type of devotional life or practice throughout the day. If this is a new idea, describe what kind of benefits someone might experience by learning this simple practice.

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2. When beginning to practice mindfulness and meditation techniques, it is normal to have a challenging time with distracting thoughts. Over time, it will become easier, as we learn different techniques that allow us to have better focus and clarity in the moment.

Why do you think it is easy for us to struggle with distracting thoughts during mindfulness and meditation?

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3. There are many forms of mindfulness and meditation, and it takes time to find what works for each of us. We can read and reflect on scriptures that bring personal comfort or imagine peaceful scenes that reflect safety. Other forms of mindfulness involve art, music, and peaceful activities. These can become part of our devotional experience or even new hobbies.

How can you see yourself using different mindfulness and meditation techniques throughout your day-to-day life?

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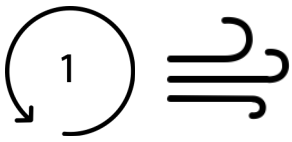
THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

CLARITY & CONNECTING

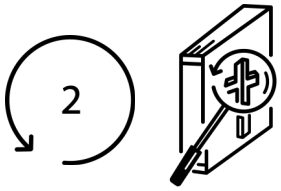
Try the guided mindfulness and meditation exercise below on your own or with others. Use it as a **Healthy Coping Strategy** throughout your week to help clear a path away from the crowds, chaos, and stress, and to reconnect with Jesus!

After you complete the exercise, describe your experience. What benefits did you gain and what challenges did you encounter?

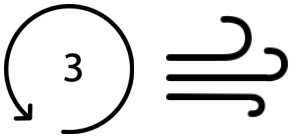
FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share your response with your group.



Get into a comfortable seated position. Start by inhaling and exhaling slowly. Focus on the cool air coming in through your nose and imagine the Holy Spirit's comfort in each breath that you take. Exhale through your mouth. If comfortable, close your eyes or choose one spot in the room to focus on gently.



Slowly read Psalm 23 aloud in a soft, relaxing tone or quietly to yourself. As the scripture is read, visualize the setting, the colors that you see, the sounds that you hear, the scents that you smell, and the different things you can touch. As you imagine everything that is described, allow your breath to be slow, deep, and relaxed.



To close, inhale through your nose to a count of four, pause for a count of four and exhale through your mouth slowly to the end.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." **Psalm 23**

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, try to incorporate a simple mindfulness and meditation activity when you're experiencing stress or overwhelming symptoms.

2. It is normal to have a difficult time at first. Remember, you are not a failure. This is a process of exploring and learning something new.

3. Don't be afraid to try different activities to continue learning what might be helpful to you. Try not to get stuck on any particular method if it's not working for you.

PRAYER

"Lord, thank You for sending Your Son to walk amongst us in our humanity. Thank You for modeling that our need for quietness, stillness and time alone to connect with You is okay! We are grateful for Your guidance this week as we search for times to pull away from the chaos and demands of our lives into stillness with You. Thank You for remaining present with us through it all! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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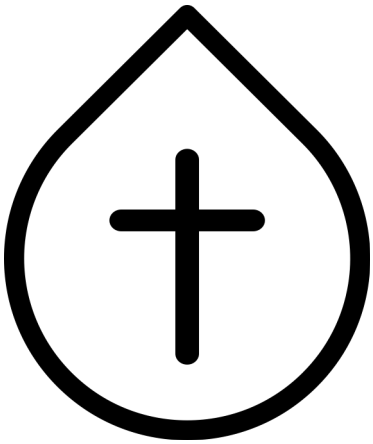
CHAPTER ELEVEN

GRIEVING AND GRACE



KEY POINT

Grieving is a normal and healthy part of the mental health recovery process.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ MATTHEW 14:6-14

Upon hearing the tragic news of John the Baptist's death, there was no doubt that Jesus felt a range of emotions. Maybe it was pain, sadness, frustration, anger, or all of the above! Those feelings led to a response that was only natural: Jesus took time to be by Himself and process this loss. After giving Himself space to grieve and reflect, Jesus was able to return to the crowds, ready to serve them with a heart of love and compassion.

Many of us can relate to Jesus' feelings of grief and loss. It might be the loss of a person, a job, our health, a life stage, a relationship, or even a vision of how we thought our lives would look. Anything that disrupts our plans or dreams, including our mental health difficulties and disorders, can cause grief. Stories like the tragedy of John the Baptist's death remind us of the humanity of Jesus and His ability to relate to our pain. When we hurt, He hurts. We are grieving with a God who understands and grieves with us. Jesus shows us that it's ok to experience these emotions, and He encourages us to intentionally take the space and the time we need to grieve properly.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Grief is the reaction to a significant personal loss. The aftermath of a loss impacts how we perceive ourselves and our overall safety and security. We can define loss as the loss of a loved one, employment, a home, personal dreams, or something private and personal to our lives. God designed us to grieve these losses. It is His way of allowing our emotions to heal and regain our strength and purpose in life.

How have you experienced grief in relation to your mental health difficulty or disorder?

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2. Grieving can be challenging. Because of this, it is a great opportunity for us to lean upon our supportive communities (e.g., family, friends, church community), allowing them to provide comfort, encouragement, and practical help.

Who are the immediate family members or friends who provide you with practical support when you're grieving? What do they do to help?

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3. The grieving process can feel like being on a roller coaster. The key is to be aware of how we're managing our overall health and lifestyle (e.g., sleep, eating, exercise, energy, etc.). If our health is diminishing and we are experiencing ongoing feelings of depression, it is common to seek professional therapy for support. We do not need to be afraid or ashamed to receive professional care.

Describe how the grieving process tends to impact your overall health and lifestyle (e.g., sleep, eating, exercise, energy).

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4. Grieving is not a linear, step-by-step experience. It is a process that looks different for each person and takes time. Going through this process will empower us to find a new "normal" in life and bring us to a place of healthy resolve and even a new resilient purpose.

How has allowing yourself to grieve helped you live a healthier life and discover a new resilient purpose?

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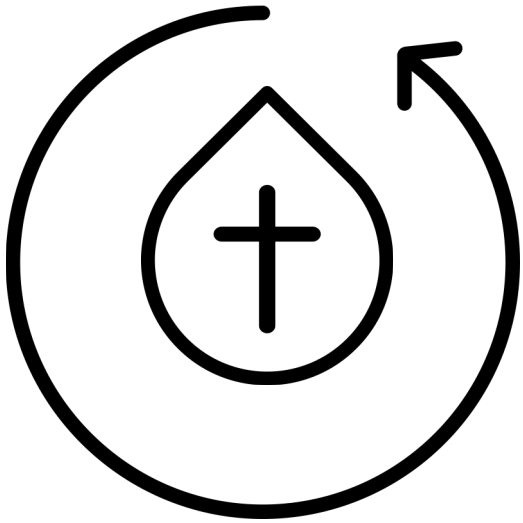
THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

RESILIENT GRIEVING

The following pages list different aspects of the grieving experience. Each element of grief describes Our Possible Experience (e.g., what we might feel and how we might respond) and the Purpose (e.g., the importance of each part of the process). Read over all of the descriptions listed on the next page.

Afterward, you will have the opportunity to explore your own grieving experience. In the "My Grieving Experience" space provided, write down where you currently are in your grieving experience (e.g., shock, pain, judgment, bargaining, or resilience), and how you're currently experiencing this grief.



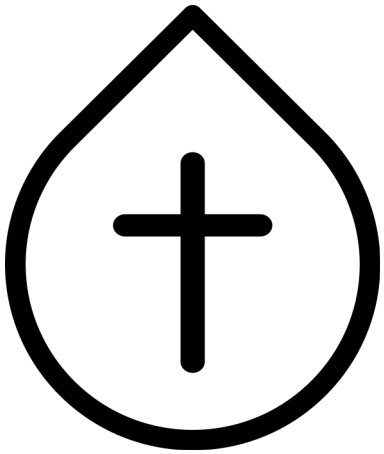
RESILIENT GRIEVING

SHOCK

Cushion & Denial

Our Possible Experience
Numbness, disbelief, avoidance and restlessness OR suppression of the issue and attempt to live as if nothing has happened. We may start to search for a quick-fix through healing or breakthrough.

Purpose
Shock is designed to cushion the impact of a loss or hardship, providing emotional protection as we slowly absorb the pain of an experience.



RESILIENCE

Acceptance & Resolve

Our Possible Experience: This is not believing we're "healed" or refusing to understand struggles fully. Instead, it is being able to move forward with healthy acknowledgment and outlook on the current situation. Circumstances could trigger us back to a previous aspect of grieving, which is normal. Having been through those prior parts of grieving, we can learn to navigate it better.

Purpose: We develop a new resilient strength when you've grieved through pain. We are now able to acknowledge your loss and/or new circumstances and accept how it impacts our life. We have a new sense of empathy to give compassion and support to others.

PAIN

Detachment, Anger, & Sadness

Our Possible Experience: We can easily become stuck focusing on the hurt and pain or suppressing our emotions through intentional isolation. Pain may also turn into reactive and impulsive anger or argumentative and vengeful behavior.

Purpose: Difficult emotions help validate the pain and reality of our stressor, loss, or hardship. This discomfort enables us to detach from that loss and discover a new identity and possibly a "new normal."

JUDGMENT & BARGAINING

Control, Guilt, & Shame

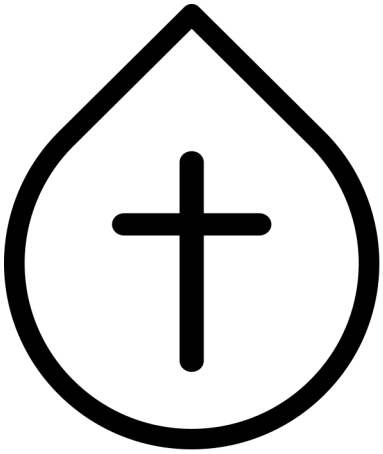
Our Possible Experience: May begin to blame God, ourselves, or others, or feel a sense of low self-worth, discouragement, and hopelessness. May also try to bargain with God for healing.

Purpose: Experience of a deeper pain allows us to process through confusion, doubt, and self-criticism and discover truths that lead to comfort and hope.

FOR GROUP USE: Read over the descriptions. If comfortable, share about your own grief experience with your group.

SHOCK

Cushion & Denial



PAIN

Detachment, Anger, & Sadness

JUDGMENT & BARGAINING

Control, Guilt, & Shame

RESILIENCE

Acceptance & Resolve

MY GRIEVING EXPERIENCE

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, actively seek out a group of individuals (professional or personal) that can encourage you. Don't be afraid to let them know how they can specifically help you.

2. Remember, Jesus took the time to grieve! Allow yourself the space to acknowledge where you are, rest in God's overwhelming love for you, and move forward into purpose.

PRAYER

"Lord, in our confusion, sadness, loss, and grief, we are so grateful that You already know what we're feeling and thinking – we are not alone! We are thankful that You are a God who can relate to the experience of heartache and loss. As we learn about our own grief experience and how we manage, thank You for guiding us with Your strength and comfort so we can heal in healthy and purposeful ways. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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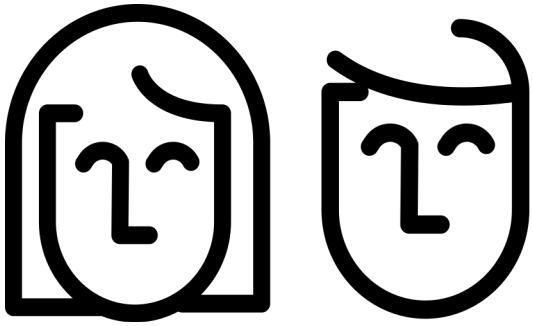
CHAPTER TWELVE

LIFE-GIVING COMMUNITY



KEY POINT

An active and supportive community of believers cultivates life, while isolation brings frustration and fatigue.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ MARK 2:1-12

As a growing public figure, Jesus generated huge crowds wherever He went. In this particular instance, there was no room left inside *or* outside the home where He was teaching. This left the man with paralysis and his friends with one option for access: the roof. They must have trusted that Jesus would come through, because lowering their friend down from the roof was a lot easier than it would have been to lift him back up! Seeing the trust and effort that was involved in this plan, Jesus took note of "*their*" faith. These friends demonstrated true community, as they carried one another's physical, mental, and spiritual burdens to the only One who had the capacity to bear them all.

There are times when we may feel stuck or even paralyzed by our mental health difficulties and disorders. Just like the man with paralysis, there are moments when we need community and trusting relationships to walk alongside us, or carry us through the inevitable trials of our lives. We can remain confident that a healthy, life-giving community is one of God's healing provisions as we experience His everlasting love and presence together.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

A LIFE-GIVING COMMUNITY …

1. **ENCOURAGES & STRENGTHENS** – A strong community offers acceptance, comfort, support, and encouragement. Individuals in a healthy community gain wisdom as they learn from one another's mistakes and successes. A life in community centers on like-hearted understanding. The individuals take risks together, believe in one another, and strengthen one another.

How does community currently play a role in your life?

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2. **BUILDS CONFIDENCE** – When coming into a new community, it is normal to feel some anxiety related to sharing our mental health difficulties and disorders with others. However, this doesn't mean we owe others an excuse or explanation – we can wait for the right timing to share our experiences. In light of this, it is important to have a couple of friends who are understanding and trustworthy, to honor and support us in social settings. The encouragement of these friends can allow us to focus on being ourselves and not always feeling like the "sick" or "needy" one.

Name one or two people in your life who fill this role and describe how they support you.

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3. **STAYS CONNECTED** – The stigma tied to mental health difficulties and disorders can cause many of us to pull away and isolate. In addition, the pressure to keep up with social gatherings and community events can become overwhelming. Instead of wearing ourselves out with these social pressures, it is ok to know our limits, set healthy boundaries, and find new, simple ways to stay connected to life-giving friends and community.

What are simple ways you have been able to stay connected to community and avoid isolation?

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

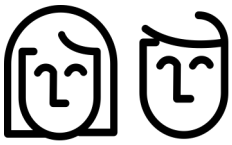
MY STRENGTH NETWORK

For Group Use: Take some time as a group to recognize a few positive changes you have seen in yourself and a few positive changes you have seen in one another. Discuss how being part of this group (community) has been especially helpful in your mental health journey.

HOW COMMUNITY HAS HELPED ME

Being part of this Grace Group community
(or any supportive community) has helped me grow to be more:

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....



HOW I HAVE SEEN MY COMMUNITY GROW

I have watched others in this Grace Group
(or any supportive community) become more:

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....

FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. This week, focus on developing close friendships with people you trust – people who honor you and support you. Then, when you are able, enjoy the larger group settings as yourself, not someone who is always assumed to be "the sick one."

2. As you feel more confident, your friendships will broaden and you can share more about yourself with others. When they see your grace, strength, and confidence, you will dispel stigmas and become the authority they seek on the topic of mental health.

3. Take time to enjoy these friendships and find new ways to build them into your life naturally.

PRAYER

"Lord, we thank You that we weren't designed to be alone! We are grateful that You remind us that we do have a place and we do belong. What comfort we receive in knowing that You are with us as we take steps of faith to connect with current and new communities in our lives! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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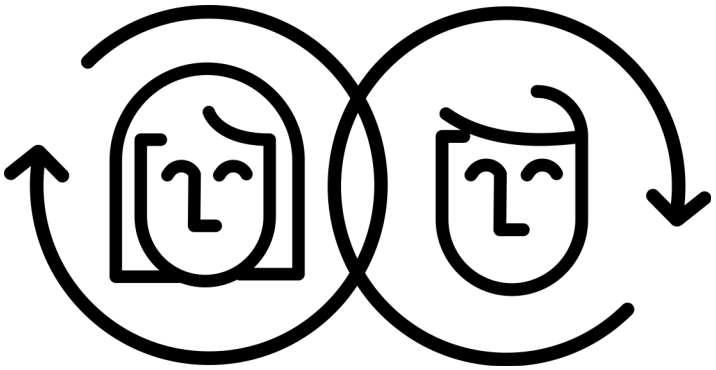
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SAFE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



KEY POINT

God desires us to be in safe and healthy relationships that build life and empower us.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ ACTS 15:36-41 AND 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-14

Paul and Barnabas began their friendship as the earliest evangelistic "dream team," traveling great distances and enduring many challenges to tell people about Jesus. However, their friendship struggled after a sharp disagreement. Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, joined them on their first missionary journey only to then abandon Paul and Barnabas with no explanation. When Paul and Barnabas began planning their second missionary journey, Barnabas proposed the idea of inviting John Mark once again, but Paul refused. Their dispute eventually led to what we often call a "falling out." Despite the unpopular opinion, Barnabas did not give up on his young cousin, recognized his valuable purpose, and desired to be part of his development as a growing follower of Jesus. John Mark eventually became a key contributor to the growth of the early Church and is known to be the author of the New Testament book of Mark.

Living with mental health difficulties and disorders can often cause relationships in our lives to feel strained and unhealthy. Maybe we've had friends or family give up on us or abandon us because of our ongoing symptoms and difficulties. Barnabas' belief in John Mark's purpose and potential provides us with the hope that healthy and empowering friendships are possible. Safe and healthy relationships strive to understand our mental health difficulties and seek to support and empower us through our mental health recovery process. These relationships don't have to be perfect, but they should be built on mutual trust, honor, respect, and unconditional love.

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. The symptoms of mental health difficulties and disorders can interfere with trust, emotional closeness, communication, and effective problem-solving in various relationships. God will provide grace to help us learn new and simple ways to build healthy relationships.

How has your mental health difficulty or disorder impacted your closest relationships (e.g., spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, family, or best friends)?

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2. Many of us with mental health difficulties can rely on our spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, family, and close friends as our only source of emotional stability. As we continue to learn the balance of managing our emotions, we can move away from only depending on our family and friends for emotional, spiritual, and physical security.

How have you learned to stay balanced in your relationships (e.g., giving/receiving), instead of relying on just one or two people?

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3. **Negative relationships** can involve strong emotional dependency, coercion or pressure to participate in substance (alcohol or drugs) abuse, violence, aggression, criminal behaviors and activities, or a heightened need to control (both friendships and intimate relationships). **Safe and healthy relationships** have no unhealthy expectations. Instead, they have mutual support for giving and receiving love, honor, and respect. Safe and healthy relationships are not perfect, but they create a healthy environment for each person to grow and thrive.

How do you determine whether a relationship is safe and stable? What boundaries do you have for yourself to avoid negative relationships?

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Supportive and empowering boyfriends/girlfriends, spouses, family members, and friends are important parts of your mental health recovery. They can be there to listen and to help you through rough times.

2. Continue to build and grow in safe and healthy relationships that have mutual love, honor, and respect. Remember, they are not perfect, but they provide a healthy environment for you to thrive.

PRAYER

"Lord, we thank You that Your love for us never fails, and because of Your constant presence, we never have to be alone! We are grateful that we were created to enjoy safe and healthy relationships that are full of mutual love, honor, and respect. Thank You that You will continue to guide us this week as we grow in caring for the relationships in our lives! In Jesus' name, Amen."

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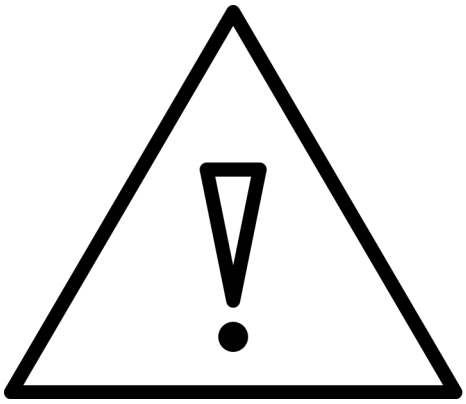
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT



KEY POINT

Truth removes guilt and condemnation and helps us know that mental health difficulties and disorders are not our fault.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
3. **Healthy Communication:** Avoid fixing anyone's challenge, correcting, debating, or using offensive language.
4. **Healthy Community:** Discover hope and useful tools while learning from one another's journeys.

FAITH

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, thank You for being with us and understanding our mental health journey. Give us Your wisdom to discover helpful insights and tools for each of our paths. Thank You for giving us Your hope, grace, and steadfast love for today and for better days to come. In Jesus' name, Amen."

READ JOB 2:9-13 AND JAMES 5:11

Job was a man who was upright and blameless. He loved God with all of his heart. But despite his relentless love and devotion, Job's life took a turn for the worse. In the course of one day, Job experienced unfathomable loss and suffering. He lost nearly every possession and family member and contracted a physical illness that had no cure. Job could not wrap his mind around why all of this could have happened. Even though Job's friends showed up with "false sympathy" and sat with him in grief, they had faulty speculations as to why God would allow such terror to occur. Both his wife and his friends assumed that only sin could have caused such misfortune. But Job was not at fault for his problems and illness! Even in complete devastation, Job endured by honoring and trusting the Lord, and God restored his life.

As we live with mental health difficulties and disorders, it can be easy for us to question where it all went wrong. Like Job, maybe we've lost our family, friends, and possessions. Some may even have assumed or suggested that we did something wrong or sinful to cause such difficulties. Stand firm in knowing that our mental health difficulties and disorders are not our fault! Even in our trials, God is with us. He is present with compassion and full of mercy, empowering us toward mental health resilience and wholeness of life (Isaiah 57:15).

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. Mental health difficulties and disorders are physiological conditions affecting our thoughts, emotions, and how we function in our lives. Like any other health issue, they require professional support and mental health recovery care.

Describe why it is challenging to believe that mental health difficulties and disorders are physiological conditions that affect how we think, feel, and function in daily life.

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2. Some of our symptoms may include hopelessness or other negative thoughts and feelings. However, these symptoms are the result of the mental health difficulty or disorder, NOT sin, weak faith, or demonic oppression. God knows the difference between our mental health difficulties and disorders and never loses sight of our loving security in Him and who we truly are in Him.

Describe what helps you understand that your mental health difficulties and disorders are not from sin, weak faith, or demonic oppression.

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3. Mental health difficulties and disorders can often cause us to have personal challenges with our words and actions. However, all believers struggle with sin and weakness of faith, and God still chooses to love and give us meaningful value and purpose. Thus, if we have a bad day, God is not looking at us as failures. Instead, He delights in reminding us of who we truly are *in Him* and how we are fully loved and graced to live out all that He has given us (Luke 12:32).

Describe how trusting God's constant love for us can make a difference in how we experience the various challenges in our mental health recovery process.

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4. God has a purpose and a plan for our lives. No matter what weaknesses or struggles we may be experiencing, God is *for* us and not against us. Therefore, God desires to bless us through our mental health recovery with a meaningful life that is possible for all of us.

How has your mental health difficulty or disorder impacted your purpose? What are the ways you have found or can find meaningful purpose again?

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. **LEARN** about your specific mental health difficulty or disorder and know that God is *for* you. As you learn more, make a special effort to remember that *it is not your fault.*

2. **FOCUS** on God's grace. Use time with God to continually remind yourself that He never stops blessing or loving you. Like Job, as you endure through the mental health recovery process, the Lord is gracious and full of compassion (Psalm 116:5) towards you every step of the way.

PRAYER

"Lord, we are thankful for Your love, compassion, and mercy that is constantly present with us as we explore mental health recovery in our lives. We are grateful for the reminder that our mental health difficulties and disorders are not our fault. Thank You that You will continue to empower us this week, as we find new ways to live with renewed confidence in how You have created us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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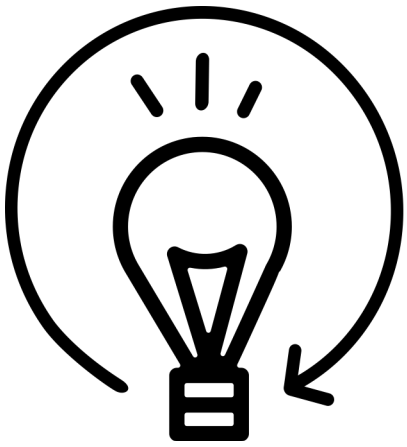
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

STAYING RESILIENT



KEY POINT

Building awareness and practicing helpful techniques helps allows us to develop resilience through our mental health recovery process.

HEALTHY GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Healthy Comfort:** Offer respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **Healthy Confidentiality:** Create a safe place to share by listening confidentially.
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FAITH

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READ GENESIS 45:4-7

Joseph endured it all: he was rejected by his family, sold into slavery, and imprisoned for a crime that he didn't even commit! In the midst of suffering and mistreatment, Joseph continued to endure and trust God, and God demonstrated that His plan for Joseph's life was not over. Through every trial and near-death experience, God was always with him. Joseph was eventually released from prison and quickly became the second most powerful man in all of Egypt. God was able to work through Joseph's trial for a far greater purpose than anyone could have imagined. Joseph's resilience through each unpredictable trial was a testimony to God's presence and plan. Ultimately, God would use Joseph to save both Egypt and the very family that initially sold him into slavery!

We are bound to experience seasons of heightened discouragement, disappointments, and trials that come from our mental health difficulties and disorders. Just like Joseph, these troubles don't mean God's plan for our lives is thwarted. We not only have a God who has begun a good work in us, but we also have a God who is faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6). This promise means that He will continue to provide us with strength and endurance as well as the tools and resources needed to bounce back and keep growing!

What do you find interesting about this story?

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FACTS

1. **Resilience** is the capacity to manage and do well, even when faced with difficult circumstances. It does not mean that mental health difficulties or disorders are necessarily cured or life is perfect. Instead, resilience is our ability to bounce back with a new strength that empowers us to persevere, and endure with strength (grace) as we rebuild into a thriving lifestyle.

How have you seen resilience within your own life?

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2. Resilient people are aware of their situation, their emotional reactions, and the behaviors of those around them. In order to manage feelings, it is essential to understand what is causing those feelings and why. By remaining aware, resilient people can maintain control of their reaction to the situation, and think of new ways to tackle the problem at hand.

Describe a recent situation where your awareness helped you manage your feelings and your symptoms.

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3. **We can learn to be resilient!** Some techniques for fostering resilience include: building positive beliefs in our abilities (self-confidence), finding a sense of purpose in our life (meaningful self-value), developing a strong social support network, embracing change, being optimistic, nurturing ourselves, developing problem-solving skills, and establishing goals.

What are the different techniques that you plan to use to help you continue to build resilience in your life? How do you see your life improving over the next few months and even in the next year?

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THE RESILIENCY EXERCISE

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

We've been on quite the journey to develop renewed strength and resilience! Sometimes it's hard to see how much we've grown and discovered about ourselves until we pause and reflect.

Using the space below, take time to recall all the ways you have grown by writing down one or two qualities for each category. Scan through the previous chapters you've completed to help you recall the skills and tools you've learned!

FOR GROUP USE: If comfortable, share about your renewed strength and resilience with your group.

MY LEAVES

Strength & Abilities

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MY BRANCHES

Coping Skills

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MY TRUNK

Personal Support Network

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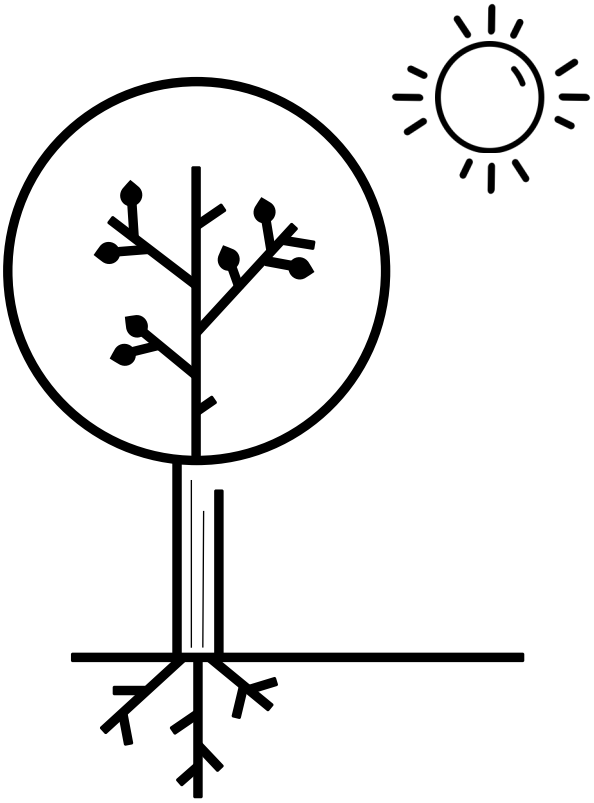

MY ROOTS

Identity & Purpose (passions/hobbies)

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MY ENVIRONMENT

Service & Impact

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FUTURE

YOUR WEEKLY TAKEAWAY

1. Keep working on your skills. Knowing that resilience takes time to develop, do not become discouraged if you still have a difficult time coping with problematic events.

2. Continue to use your relaxation techniques daily to manage episodes of anxiety and to train your body to more effectively and efficiently deal with stress.

3. Be proud of what you have accomplished so far. You are building resilience!

PRAYER

"Lord, thank You for walking alongside us as we went through this Living Grace Workbook, and for providing us with encouragement, courage, and a wealth of new skills and insights. We are so grateful for all that we've learned about You and about ourselves and the ways that You will continue to empower us to impact the world around us! Thank You for the strength that You provide as we move forward in our journey. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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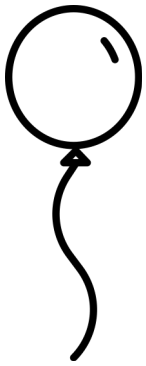
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LAST GROUP MEETING

CELEBRATE YOUR GROWTH!



This is the last group meeting! It is a time for you to celebrate everything you have learned and how your life has improved and transformed. This chapter will help guide your group in discussing and deciding your next steps as you look at the journey ahead.

If possible, try to make this group meeting a fun celebration where everyone can bring something simple to contribute (e.g., dinner, finger foods, snacks, appetizers)! You do not have to make this a meal; it is only if the group elects to have this special celebration time.

CELEBRATING LIFE

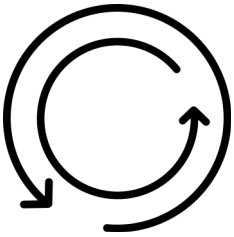
1. **What was one of the most meaningful topics or experiences that you had in this group?**

2. **How have you seen others in your group grow through this experience?**

3. **How have you seen improvement in yourself, and how has that helped improve your relationships with your spouse/family/friends?**

DISCOVERING THE ROAD AHEAD

Explore a variety of options to find what may be best for your ongoing journey!

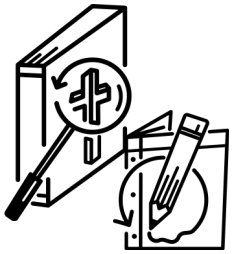


1

CONSIDER GOING THROUGH THE CURRICULUM AGAIN WITH NEW PARTICIPANTS.

Why go through again?

It helps to build ongoing resilience and develop deeper insights.

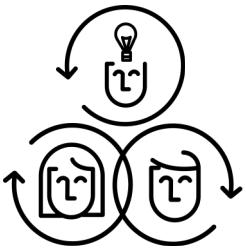


2

CHOOSE ANOTHER CURRICULUM TO EXPERIENCE TOGETHER.

Why choose another curriculum or workbook? To continue experiencing healthy community and personal growth!

Ideas: Other Grace Alliance materials, Bible studies, curricula from other organizations.



3

USE YOUR EXPERIENCE TO HELP OTHERS.

Train to become a Grace Group leader or find other ways to serve in your church community.

GRACE
ALLIANCE

What to do now:
Filled with hope and delight, we pray that you keep growing and going (Romans 15:13).

❶ Consider utilizing one of our other resources for your (and your group's) continued growth (for free)

+ **FREE BOOKS –** Grace and Thrive workbooks (downloadable + printable)
+ **FREE COMMUNITY –** Online group leader training and support
+ **FREE HOPE + TOOLS –** Educational guides, devotionals, articles, and more

❷ If possible, consider any size monthly or one-time donation and be a part of making Grace Alliance's Christian mental health resources a free, life-changing experience accessible to anyone worldwide.

Every gift makes a difference.

To give today, please visit us on the web
or use the QR code to make your gift today.

MentalHealthGraceAlliance.org/donate

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